

OOLTEWAH MIDDLE SCHOOL

Touching lives and empowering students to successfully connect learning to life. . . .

Ooltewah Middle School's focus for the coming year is to set the stage for our vision---an attainable vision, if we incorporate strategies which foster the development of personal connections within such a large school. By restructuring our daily schedule, we will allow longer classes with fewer interruptions in each content area on all grade levels. The restructured schedule will provide ample time for teachers in which they may implement selected literacy strategies, performance based assessments, and both immediate interventions for struggling students, as well as enrichment for higher achieving students. Another layer of our schedule will result in the elimination of ability grouping for all classes. Research has shown that all students benefit from heterogeneous groups, which allow all students to be challenged by employing the use of differentiated instruction strategies. Through the use of heterogeneous groups, higher achieving students will strengthen their level of understanding and application, as they coach their peers. Clearly, the benefit to struggling students is the opportunity to work with more successful students and raise the bar of their own achievement.

In order to challenge all students, the faculty of Ooltewah Middle School will participate in national institutes, as well as job embedded professional development, which will focus on differentiated instruction and content literacy strategies. The result of professional development opportunities for teachers will be the sharing of strategies learned through on-site collaboration on scheduled in-service days. Strategies learned by teachers from national institutes will be shared and modeled during scheduled professional development days. A second focus of on-site professional development will include both horizontal and vertical curriculum alignment, not only among our staff, but also drawing in our elementary and high school teaching partners. Third, the use of lesson studies will provide support and growth for all content area teachers.

A core team of seventh and eighth grade teachers volunteered to pilot two looping teams. It is our belief that through looping, effective relationships will be created within smaller learning communities. By keeping students for two years, crucial instructional time will be increased, thereby eliminating the "getting to know you" period each year. In addition, daily routines and ongoing communication with parents established in the first year will be continued and strengthened throughout the second year. While we believe all students will benefit, it is also important to note that our exceptional education students will prosper from the supportive environment and the familiarity developed during the two- year looping period. We believe that students will benefit in all content areas, but particularly in the high school level courses offered in the eighth grade (Physical Science and Algebra). With essentially two years to prepare students, we believe teachers will have the flexibility to realign needed skills and integrate a spiraling curriculum with the same students.

In researching various teaching strategies, we were particularly intrigued with single-gender (same-sex) classes. Evident from our dialogues with our five feeder elementary schools, we found that reading is a primary concern with students lacking the skills needed in order to transition successfully to middle school. Talking with our high school partner, we found that the same concern is continued as our middle school students transition to the ninth grade. Because of these discussions and the need to assist students in transition while addressing learning styles, we decided to implement single-gender reading classes in sixth grade. By doing so, teachers will select specific pieces of literature that will target the interests of either boys or girls. We see additional benefits as we focus on reading non-fiction pieces, which are frequently challenging for most students. Although the single-gender classes will be highly structured, they will also allow flexibility in activities and selections to be studied.

Reading and math remedial workshops, targeting the lowest 20% of students, who are not currently receiving special services, will be offered. Our goal will be to move more students toward proficiency in areas of math and reading, which will be evident from both TCAP scores and common assessments. The change coach and workshop teachers will collaborate on the design and implementation of the new classes. Of special emphasis will be the integration of software with strategies to ensure that students are engaged and excited while learning.

In order to meet the educational, emotional, and social needs of our students, we will again focus on our altering our schedule to create smaller learning communities. In addition, we will establish a series of programs and parent classes to make each child and the family of the child feel a part of our Ooltewah Middle School community. Instead of conducting a large one-day registration for our sixth graders, we will initiate family evenings for each feeder school. During the evening, parents and children will meet teachers, view a program on the “fears” and “successes” associated with middle school, take a tour of the sixth grade Owl Academy area, and get a chance to meet and talk to other parents and students. During the summer, we will offer an Owl Camp for incoming sixth graders. The camp will create another layer of belonging, as we mix youngsters in small groups with students from other feeder schools to become familiar with our expectations and procedures in a camp setting.

Students will begin their middle school portfolio in sixth grade with samples of writing and other work, which they will use to practice self-assessing and reflection of their written work. They will see proof of their success, as they review the portfolios (two types, both scrapbook version and electronic version) on a regular basis throughout their middle school years. Opening of school in the fall will begin with yet another layer of belonging, as students receive their schedules and meet even more new faces, while participating in selected transitional activities with their classes. Additionally, we will offer Related Arts explorations for sixth grade students, which will allow students to sample all available classes, in order to discover new areas of interest and belonging.

Incoming seventh and eighth grade upper-classmen, those who transfer into our school, will receive assistance with the transition in a new school by a pairing up with one of our seventh and eighth grade Ooltewah Ambassadors. Sponsored by teachers, these Ambassadors will participate in a Related Arts class called JOBS, *Jumping on Board to Serve*, for one semester. During the class, students will practice skills, using Steven Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens. Throughout the year the Ambassadors will participate in school wide projects to improve our facility, serve as peer coaches, partner with new students, and act as building guides as needed. Our ultimate goal is that our Ambassadors will eventually teach our youngest group, sixth grade, to apply some of the same skills, as they progress through middle school.

Parents of all students will be invited to quarterly parent classes. Sixth grade parents may attend “Welcome to the Nest”, seventh grade parents may attend “In the Middle”, and eighth grade parents may attend “Taking Flight” classes. Each class will address specific concerns or areas of interest specific for the particular grade level and will be sponsored by our guidance department.